

# The Interplay of Morality and Social Order in Al-Ghazali's Thought

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the close relationship between morality and social order in the thoughts of Al-Ghazali, a great classical Islamic thinker who combines ethical, political, and spiritual dimensions within the community development framework. This research used a literature study method to critically analyze Al-Ghazali's main works, such as *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Nasihat al-Muluk*, and *Al-Mustazhiri*. The study results show that Al-Ghazali places morality as the foundation for creating a just, orderly, dignified society. Morality is seen as a personal responsibility and a controlling element in leadership and socio-political life. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of moral leaders, moral education as a social transformation, and the role of religion in maintaining public civility. He also viewed morality as a form of resistance to social damage, especially in the face of the decadence of political and religious elites. This article concludes that Al-Ghazali's thoughts are relevant to the contemporary context as a model of social reconstruction based on Islamic values, spirituality, and ethical justice. Hopefully, these findings can enrich the discourse on developing a more integrative, moderate, and sustainable Islamic society.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Imam Al-Ghazali's contributions to individual morality and social order resonate in contemporary ethics, particularly in understanding the relationship between personal moral integrity and societal stability. His thinking has not only impacted the development of Islamic thought but has also significantly contributed to the study of social ethics in the Western world. Al-Ghazali argued that an individual's moral character forms the basis of social cohesion. This perspective is consistent with research showing that moral cognition and emotion

significantly influence prosocial behavior, contributing to social order and overall societal health (Carlo et al., 2010; Malti et al., 2009). Moral cognition provides individuals with a framework for evaluating actions and acquiring meaning associated with moral norms, ultimately driving behavior that benefits community dynamics [2]. In addition, Al-Ghazali's reflections on ethics emphasize the important dimensions of self, society, and spirituality, suggesting that a holistic understanding of morality must encompass all of these aspects (Hafijhin, 2018; Asy'arie et al., 2023). His theory encourages individuals

to reach a state where moral behavior is innate, which encourages actions that benefit others without conscious consideration. This perspective aligns with contemporary ideas where enduring moral dispositions significantly influence socially acceptable behaviors, underlining that moral identity is fundamental to achieving social harmony [1] [5]. Therefore, this study examines the interaction between personal morality and social structure in al-Ghazali's thought, which is very relevant to current social and ethical discourse.

The phenomenon of modern life shows a significant tension between individual morality and the need to create a just social order. The crisis of morality that has hit many societies reflects the imbalance between personal norms and existing social structures. For example, high rates of social injustice and intergroup conflict often illustrate the distortion between the values lived by individuals and social systems that do not fully support a just order. A study by Koval et al. showed that changes in the normative-value hierarchy in social development can contribute to forming new norms relevant to the modern context [6]. This view aligns with Bofill-Poch, who notes that the crisis of morality, especially in elderly care, also creates challenges related to social expectations and responsibilities [7].

Al-Ghazali also proposed a discussion on morality in the context of social order through his thoughts on justice and adab. In this context, al-Ghazali considers individual morality the primary foundation for creating a stable social structure (Orman, 2018; Özbay & Syed, 2022). He emphasizes the concept of adab and akhlak to align individual morality with the larger social order, offering a solution to the gap between personal values and broader social needs. The research reviewed by Jannah emphasizes the importance of understanding moral values in the context of character education, where these values can help prevent a moral crisis in the era of globalization [10]. This thinking has inspired various interpretations and applications in the broader social context but

is often viewed separately between personal morality and social organization.

Although many studies have examined morality in al-Ghazali's thought, most focus only on the personal ethical dimension without deeply linking it to the broader social order. For example, research by Lubis and Widiawati discusses spiritual education in the context of morally balanced character formation but does not link this thinking to the broader social order [11]. In this study, al-Ghazali is seen as a moral figure and a thinker who can contribute to developing a more inclusive and harmonious society [12]. The concept of moderation in al-Ghazali's thought shows the potential to contribute to a stable social order. In this context, research by Husni et al. shows that the principle of religious moderation conveyed in Surah Al-Hujurat has substantial implications for the development of a diverse and inclusive society [13]. This becomes relevant when we discuss how al-Ghazali's teachings can be translated into a practical framework for creating a more just social structure. In addition, a more holistic study of the relationship between individual morality and social order is necessary to close the gap in the existing literature because this factor can provide a framework for enforcing moral values in society [14]. Therefore, a significant gap in the literature connects al-Ghazali's morality theory with social theory. In al-Ghazali's thought, a more holistic study of the relationship between individual morality and a stable social order is still minimal. This study will fill this gap by examining how morality and social order interact with each other in al-Ghazali's thoughts and their contribution to forming an ethical and just society.

The novelty of this study lies in the approach that integrates al-Ghazali's moral thought with broader social theory, thus allowing for a discussion of how individuals and society can function harmoniously. This study will offer a new perspective on understanding al-Ghazali's thoughts by examining the relationship between personal morality and social order and its application in modern society. In addition, this study will

look at the relevance and application of al-Ghazali's thoughts in facing contemporary social challenges such as injustice, conflict, and the increasing moral crisis. Thus, this study contributes to the study of al-Ghazali's thought and provides practical solutions for building a better and more moral society.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method to understand and analyze Al-Ghazali's thoughts regarding the relationship between morality and social order within his framework of thought. Literature study was chosen as the main method because it includes explaining, interpreting, and summarizing published materials to develop new theories and identify research gaps [15]. The data used in this study are Al-Ghazali's works, especially those related to ethics, morality, and society, such as *Ihya' Ullum al-Din* (Ghazali, 1963) and *Al-Munkidh Min al-Dalal* [17]. In addition, scientific journals, books, and articles discussing Al-Ghazali's thoughts are also supporting sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding (Akbar et al., 2024; Asri et al., 2025 ; Farida & Kasdi, 2021). Using a qualitative approach, researchers focus on interpreting the meaning contained in these works to expose the relationship between morality and social order in the context of Al-Ghazali's thoughts.

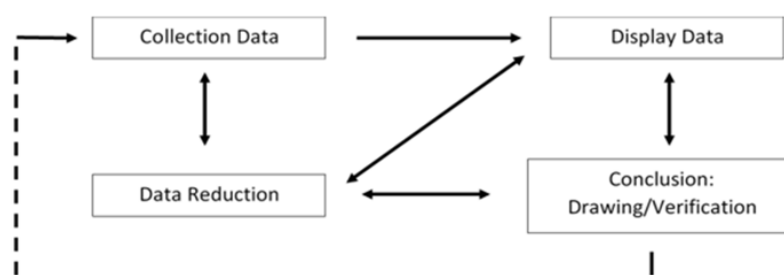
### 2.2 Research Ethics and Data Collection Methods

This study prioritizes academic ethics in data collection and processing, especially in

selecting the sources used. All sources used in this study are taken from legitimate literature and published by trusted publishers, both from Al-Ghazali's works and from adequate experts. Data were collected through in-depth literature searches by selecting relevant literature to the research topic. Literature searches were carried out systematically by identifying texts containing morality and social order in Al-Ghazali's thoughts. This data collection process involves the Scopus database, the selection of books and scientific articles that are of high academic quality, and relevance to the research context. In addition, this study also focuses on understanding the text in the historical and cultural context of Al-Ghazali's thoughts, as well as applying ethical principles that apply in academic research, such as honesty in citation and respect for copyright.

### 2.3 Research Steps and Data Analysis

The steps of this research follow a qualitative approach using the Miles & Huberman data analysis method, which consists of three main stages: data collection, data reduction, and data presentation (Liang et al., 2012; Roller, 2019 ; White & Marsh, 2006). In the first stage, researchers collect data through relevant literature searches, especially the Scopus database. After that, in the data reduction stage, researchers sort and filter the information most relevant to the central theme of the study. This process is carried out by paying attention to the context of Al-Ghazali's thoughts and interpretations in accordance with the theoretical framework of morality and social order [24].



**Figure 1.** Data Analysis Diagram of the Miles and Huberman framework Miles & Huberman (1994).



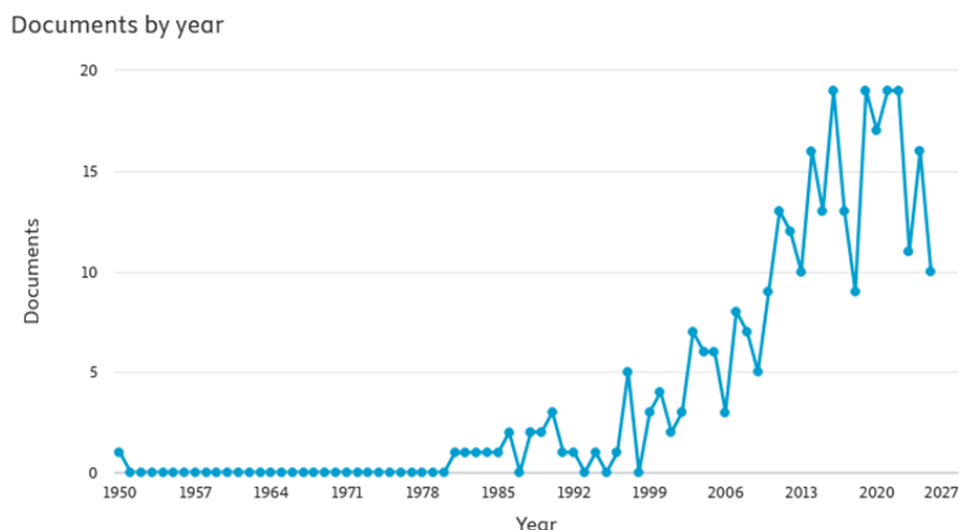


Figure 3. Research Trends on "Morality" and "Social Order" based on Scopus data

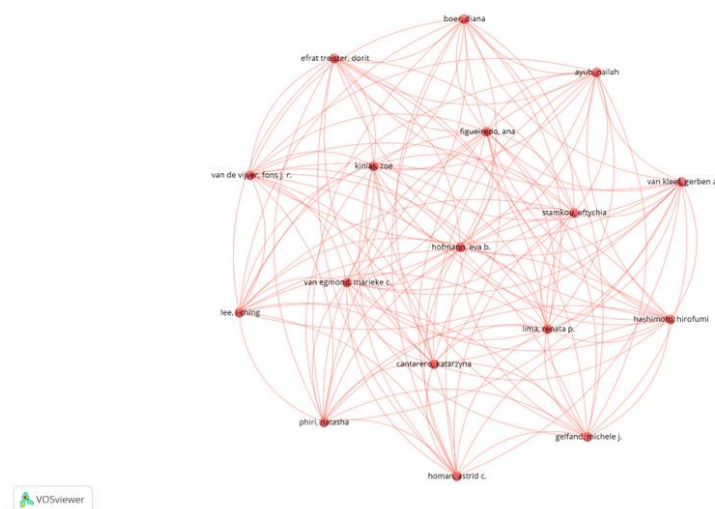


Figure 4. Visualization of the co-authorship network from the data of 303 articles.

#### 4.1 Thematic Connections between Morality and Social Order

Through the search of the Scopus database TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Morality" AND "Social Order"), 303 scientific works were found discussing Based on the results of bibliometric visualization of 303 articles in the Scopus database, it appears that the theme of "morality" has a very close relationship with "social order" (Figure 1). Morality is at the center of the entire network of concepts, indicating that moral issues are the primary foundation in various related academic discourses. Social order appears in a cluster adjacent to

morality, indicating that these concepts are often studied together in various contexts.

The relationship between morality and social order is reflected in several thematic groups that emerge from the visualization. First, in politics and ideology, morality is associated with issues such as politics, feminism, social problems, and liberal ideology. This shows that morality not only regulates individual behavior but also becomes the basis for forming social and political systems that regulate people's lives. Second, the study of gender and identity shows how moral values influence social norms related to gender roles,

sexuality, and social vulnerability, such as in the case of homelessness and gender-based discrimination. In this case, morality becomes a determinant in forming social hierarchies and social exclusion.

Furthermore, religion and ethics play an important role in the relationship between morality and social order. Moral values derived from religions such as Islam and Catholicism help shape social norms and the structure of society. On the other hand, psychological aspects such as emotion, empathy, shame, and altruism are also closely connected to morality, indicating that social order is not only maintained through external laws or rules but also internal mechanisms such as self-control and moral awareness.

This visualization shows that morality is an important foundation in building and maintaining social order. It does not stand alone but is greatly influenced by various dimensions of human life, such as politics, religion, psychology, and culture. This multidisciplinary approach to the study of morality and social order shows the complexity of the relationship between values, behavior, and social structure in contemporary society.

The collaborative network of authors in morality and social order research shows a highly collaborative and interconnected academic ecosystem (Figure 4). The presence of key figures at the center of collaboration indicates that they play a significant role in producing and disseminating knowledge in this field. The high intensity of collaboration also reflects the interdisciplinary and global nature of morality and social order studies, which involve cross-cultural, cross-national, and multidisciplinary areas, including psychology, sociology, and political science.

#### **4.2 Integration Between Ethical, Political, and Spiritual Dimensions in Al-Ghazali's Thought**

The main findings of this study indicate that Al-Ghazali integrated three main

dimensions, ethics, politics, and spirituality, into a unified whole in building the social structure and Islamic civilization. Al-Ghazali's ethical vision is characterized by integrating philosophical and scriptural ideas into a seamless ethical framework, where virtue is seen as a form of beauty that naturally elicits human love [25]. Politically, Al-Ghazali's concept of leadership, known as the democracy, emphasizes that leadership must be supported by the people under the demands of religion, combining elements of both Sunni and Shia traditions [26]. Spiritually, Al-Ghazali's thoughts on the history of human life and spirituality highlight the importance of the spiritual world and the ultimate goal of happiness through meeting God [27]. In addition, his synthesis of Sufism and philosophy emphasizes the unity of knowledge and action as the basis of the moral state of the soul, which is essential for assessing the correctness of any action [28]. This comprehensive integration of ethics, politics, and spirituality reflects Al-Ghazali's holistic approach to developing a strong Islamic civilization. Therefore, the ideal leader, according to Al-Ghazali, is a figure who is not only politically intelligent but also morally clean and spiritually mature.

In sequence, the most important findings are that ethics become the controlling principle of political power, preventing power from deviation and injustice (Maria Ulfa & Herawati, 2022 ; Haris et al., 2024). Furthermore, politics that are connected to spiritual values are not only oriented towards worldly power but also towards the welfare of the people and the responsibility of the hereafter [31] Houssaini, 2024). In this framework, Al-Ghazali places knowledge and scholars in a strategic position as guardians of public morality and advisors to rulers (IK Sahri, 2018) Kirabaev, 2023; Alavi, 2007). Other findings show that in Al-Ghazali's ideal system, spirituality is not only a personal matter but becomes a source of ethical motivation in all dimensions of life, including in leadership and governance [35]

The finding that ethics should be the driving force of politics is very relevant to the

ideas of other Islamic philosophers, such as Al-Farabi, who also viewed leaders as *imams* who combine wisdom with moral virtue [36], [37], [38]. However, Al-Ghazali's uniqueness lies in the depth of the Sufi approach he brings, simultaneously making spirituality the spirit that animates the ethical and political dimensions. His ideas strengthen contemporary literature on the importance of *moral governance* in the Islamic context, which states that the social resilience of a country is determined not only by the legal system but also by the moral virtues of its leaders [39], [40]. Thus, Al-Ghazali's thoughts present a profound and transformative integrative framework in viewing the relationship between the soul, morals, and the state.

The implications of these findings are significant for the development of ethical leadership and governance concepts in the modern context. Al-Ghazali's thinking offers a strong normative basis for formulating a spiritual and moral leadership model relevant to the contemporary Islamic world. In education, this thinking encourages the integration of character development, political awareness, and spiritual development as one unit. In the realm of public policy, this integrative approach can be used as a reference in building a government system that is efficient, fair, ethical, and oriented towards the noble values of religion.

#### 4.3 Morality as a Form of Resistance to Social Destruction

The main finding of this study is that morality in Al-Ghazali's thought not only functions as a guide to personal ethics but also as a critical and strategic tool to combat social damage (*fasad al-mujtama'*) [41], [42]. Al-Ghazali firmly stated that the destruction of a society or state is often not preceded by damage to the legal or economic system but by moral damage, both at the individual level and the ruling elite [43]. Thus, morality in Al-Ghazali's thought framework is transformative and corrective, which aims to save the social structure from spiritual and ethical destruction.

Of the findings analyzed, the most important is Al-Ghazali's emphasis on greed

and love of the world (*ḥubb al-dunyā*) as the root of moral decadence that destroys the foundations of social justice. (Eiadat, 2014). He describes that leaders and society who are enslaved by lust will lose the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, which ultimately leads society to chaos and injustice. The following finding is that moral education and purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) must be made into a massive social movement, not just a personal project. Finally, Al-Ghazali positions criticism of the religious elite who sell their knowledge for power as a form of moral resistance that is very progressive in its time.

The finding that morality is a tool of social resistance aligns with contemporary thinking in Islamic ethical philosophy that sees morality as a liberating force from corrupt social structures. This is also in line with the critical approach in the thinking of Ibn Taimiyyah and Ali Shariati, who place spiritual awareness as the motor of social change [44], [45], [46]. However, Al-Ghazali provides a unique dimension through a Sufi approach, making moral resistance not only verbal or political but starting from an internal revolution, namely the transformation of the heart and soul. This distinguishes Al-Ghazali from other reformist thinkers who emphasize social and economic structures as the point of emphasis of resistance.

The implications of these findings are significant, especially in the context of the social and moral crisis in the modern era. Al-Ghazali's thinking encourages the need for a community development approach that focuses not only on law and systems but also on character building and spirituality. This provides a strong basis for moral-based education to be part of strategic policies and the central role of religious figures and intellectuals in voicing moral values as a form of resistance to inequality, violence, and structural injustice. Thus, the moral resistance offered by Al-Ghazali remains relevant as a long-term solution to building a civilized and dignified society.

#### 4.4 Contemporary Relevance: Morality for Social Reconstruction

The main findings of this study indicate that Al-Ghazali's moral thinking has an extreme relevance in the contemporary social context, especially in the reconstruction of society after a moral, political, or social crisis. Al-Ghazali places morality as the basis for building a just and sustainable civilization [47]. In the modern era situation marked by moral decadence, extreme individualism, and weakening public integrity, the concept of ethics and spirituality offered by Al-Ghazali is very applicable to rebuilding collective consciousness and a healthy social structure [25], [26].

The most important findings show that sustainable social reconstruction cannot be achieved without the moral restoration of individuals and elite leaders [48], [49], [50]. Values such as honesty, trustworthiness, justice, and simplicity are the foundations that Al-Ghazali said must be embedded in the souls of leaders and citizens so that society is systemically strong and ethically dignified. Further findings highlight the importance of moral education as a long-term social investment to prevent social fragmentation. In addition, public morality must also be instilled in state institutions and public policies through the development of integrity, service ethics, and social justice.

The findings on the need for morality as a basis for social reconstruction strengthen contemporary literature such as *moral capital theory* which emphasizes that social and cultural capital are insufficient if not supported by moral capital [51]. Al-Ghazali's thinking also aligns with Hans Küng's *civil ethics approach*, which emphasizes global ethical values based on religion to resolve conflicts and build peaceful coexistence [52], [53]. However, what distinguishes Al-Ghazali is his Sufi foundation and Islamic epistemology, which are rooted in the purification of the soul and a direct relationship with God as the source of values. Thus, Al-Ghazali's approach is not merely pragmatic but transcendent and touches the deepest layers of the human soul.

The implications of this study reinforce the importance of revitalizing moral and spiritual education in modern social systems—whether in schools, state institutions, or civil communities. Social reconstruction is not enough with structural reform alone; it must touch on the ethical dimensions of citizens and their leaders. Al-Ghazali's thoughts can be a conceptual reference in designing value-based public policies, a sustainable character education system, and an organizational culture oriented towards integrity. In the contemporary Islamic world facing the challenge of value fragmentation, Al-Ghazali's thoughts are a light of collective moral restoration that is very relevant and worthy of being mainstreamed in social development discourse.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazali's comprehensive thinking shows that morality is the primary foundation in forming and preserving a just and harmonious social order. He does not separate individual morals and socio-political structures but rather integrates both within Islamic values that originate from the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), religious ethics, and spiritual awareness. In Al-Ghazali's view, moral individuals will produce a healthy society; conversely, moral decay is the beginning of the destruction of civilization.

Al-Ghazali also emphasized the importance of moral leadership and just government as absolute requirements for maintaining orderly social life. Ethics become the power controller, while spirituality becomes the source of motivation and direction of action. Thus, Al-Ghazali's thought offers an integrative framework between ethics, politics, and spirituality as a solution to social challenges in his time and the contemporary context.

Furthermore, morality in Al-Ghazali's thinking also functions as a form of resistance. Against social damage, where morality is not only a personal value but also a transformative tool to fight injustice, corrupt



power, and social inequality. In the modern context, Al-Ghazali's moral-spiritual approach can be an important alternative to formulate a civilized social reconstruction strategy based on the noble values of religion.

Thus, Al-Ghazali's thoughts remain relevant as ethical and practical inspiration in building a society that is not only institutionally strong, but also morally noble. The integration of morality in the education system, leadership, and public policy is an important step to realize a just and dignified

social order by the principles of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin.

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